Research Paper

Volume : 4 | Issue : 4 | April 2015 • ISSN No 2277 - 8179

Reservation of Women in Legislatures: Shaping Democracy in India

Law

KEYWORDS : Democracy, Equality, Women, Political participation

Dr. Suman Lata | Associate Professor, Department of Law, M.D. University, Rohtak-124001(INDIA)

ABSTRACT

Democracy is a government of the people and not a government of just men. Women's participation is fundamental to a democratic government. The Constitution of India guarantees the right to equality and has provided equal political rights to women. But even after 65 years of its implementation women's presence in Indian legislature is far away from being equal or even at par with the global average figure. The present paper attempts to examine the level of women political participation in India, reasons behind their inadequate participation and measures to improve political participation of women.

Introduction:

Political participation is an essential component of all political systems. Holding of political power only by a select few is against the concept of democracy. Democracy cannot function in its true spirit until and unless there is participation of all sections of society. In order to study and analyse the issue of political participation of women in India the present paper has been divided in three parts. In the first part meaning of political participation, the participation of women in Lok Sabha and the existing structural and other reasons for inadequate political participation of women have been analysed. The importance of women's participation in decision making bodies has been discussed in the second part of the paper. In the third and concluding part of the paper an effort has been made to suggest measures to improve the political participation of women in decision making bodies like legislatures.

Meaning of political participation:

Political participation includes those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of those who govern and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy. (*International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1968*). Political participation is the means by which governments are elected and functions. Right from voting till forming an elected government, there are a number of acts in political participation. Political participation is not confined only to exercising the Right to Vote but also includes other political activities. Sharing power at the level of the decision making process itself is a very important activity of political participation. There are a number of variables which determine the level of political participation and if the level of political participation is significantly low then it becomes a matter of grave concern for political systems especially for democracy. Any democracy cannot be considered a true democracy unless and until all sections of a given society have adequate participation at decision making level.

Women's Political Participation and the reasons for Inadequate Participation.

Table 1: Performance of Male & Female Candidates in Lok Sabha

Lok Sabha Elections	Contestants (expressed as %)		Elected Members (MP) (expressed as %)		Success Rates (expressed as %)		Voter Turnout (expressed as %)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1951-52			95	4.4			61.2	
1957	97	3	95	5.4	31.7	60	62.7	38.8
1962	96.4	3.6	93	6.7	24	50	55.4	46.6
1967	97	3	94	5.9	21.3	44.8	61.3	55.5
1971	96.9	3.1	95	4.2	18.5	24.4	55.2	49.1
1977	97.9	3	96	3.4	22.1	27.1	60.5	54.9
1980	96.9	3.1	94	5.1	11.5	19.7	56.9	51.2
1984	96.9	3.1	92	8.1	9.2	25.6	64	59.2
1989	96.7	3.3	95	5.3	8.5	13.6	62	57.3
1991	96.2	3.8	92	7.0	5.7	12.0	55.9	50.5
1996	95.7	4.3	92	7.4	3.7	6.6	57.9	53.4
1998	94.2	5.8	92	8.0	11.1	15.7	62	57.7
1999	93.9	6.1	90	8.8	11.3	17.3	60	55.6
2004	93.4	6.5	91	8.1	9.8	12.7	58	53.6
2009	93.2	6.8	89	10.9	6.4	10.6	58	55.8
2014	92.2	7.8	88	11.2	6.3	9.5	67.1	65.6

Source: *Election Commission of India*

Though the representation of women members in Lok Sabha has increased and is highest (11.2%) in 2014 Lok Sabha, it is still far lower as compared to the global average of 22% (facts and figures:2014). The participation of women as voters is not disappointing. The gender gap in the latest Lok Sabha elections of 2014 is only 1.5%. Moreover in 16 States & Union Territories this percentage was higher than men but this has not translated in to a larger number of women representatives in the legislatures. Despite an effective voter turnout women representation as contestants was very low (8% females & 92% males). Since the 1957 elections it has increased more than two times but it is still an ineffective participation- it is lesser than even 10%. Regarding women parliament members India's ranking is 104. (Women in Politics 2015). India is ranked at 37 (22%) according to the percentage of women in ministerial positions.(Women ministerial positions 2015). One of the main reasons for this is that political parties have indifferent attitude towards entry of women in to politics and do not encourage women candidates. The political parties show double standards – they seek women votes but do not field women candidates in Lok Sabha elections despite the fact that success rates of women contestants have always been higher than men in all Lok Sabha elections. Insufficient and inefficient women wings in different political parties are also responsible for not being able to promote more women candidates in elections. Excess use of money and muscle power in elections also acts to deter women contestants.

The under representation of women in the Lok Sabha and the crucial decision making bodies like the PM's cabinet is an obvious fact today. Women are being excluded from political structure in a very systematic way reflecting a deep bias in Indian society on gender basis. This is reaffirmed by the fact that the Women Reservation Bill has not been passed till date despite the same being repeatedly introduced in the Parliament since

Importance of Women's Political Participation:

In India all the women have the Right to Vote since 1950 as the Indian Constitution guarantees universal adult franchise to all Indian Citizens. Despite equal political rights even after 65 years of adoption of the Constitution, the words 'We the people' from the preamble to our Constitution have largely remained confined to men alone. The aim of the Constitution to secure equality, liberty and justice to all has remained partially fulfilled. One of the most important factors responsible for this disparity is inadequate representation of women in the decision making bodies. Equality cannot come without sharing power. Infact women have to control some part of political decision making if they are to eventually get a level playing field.(Singh V.P.1996) .A democracy without the participation of women is a contradiction in

terms....(Clinton 2011) Democracy does not and cannot operate by proxy.

Moreover, a participatory democracy is also essential for the realization of all the rights of women. Such participation will empower not only the women participating in decision making bodies but also others. Women are more likely to take women related issues –health, education, reproductive rights, liberty, dignity etc.. in a more sensitive, effective and efficient manner (Kaushik S.1996). Research conducted to study the Impact of quota system in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI), has revealed that participation of women in these institutions has brought political awareness and self confidence among them (Raising Female Leaders 2012). It has elevated the status of women in society. Women in PRI have proved that they know what power and politics is about, however ignorant and illiterate they may be. (Jain 1996)

Though the reservation of 33% seats for women in Panchayat Raj institutions gave women a sense of sharing power with men yet it has not positively affected their presence in national level political structures. The only positive impact over women's participation in formal politics has been the marked increase in voting turnout among women. Women reservation in legislature is the need of the hour as it would go a long way in removing obstacles which inhibit women participation. It will help in decreasing the wide gap between men and women's participation in elections and will establish women's partnership in the decision making process.

In a democracy it is not only peoples participation in election which is sufficient but their involvement and representation in decision making bodies is also very essential. Distribution of decision making power among all the sections of the society, and not a particular class or gender, is an essential characteristic of any democracy.

Suggestions:

In order to increase women participation in decision making process at national level and to establish true democracy women's reservation in Legislative Bodies is essential. Lalit Panicker (1996) has rightly said that the state which has perpetuated the gender inequality in social, economic and political spheres, has the duty to correct this itself. Rwanda, where 64% members of parliament are women, has reached this stage by reserving 30 percent parliament quota for women since 2003. Michella Bachelet (2 March, 2012) also expressed her views in favour of a quota to increase women's participation in legislatures. The Women in Politics (2012 report) reveals that quotas have had a positive effect on increasing women's participation in politics. In the year 2012 forty eight countries had held elections. Twenty two of these countries had quotas for women wherein 24 % of parliamentary seats were won by them. Only 12 % of seats were won by women in the countries which had no quota system for women. Therefore quota for women in legislature is very essential to increase their representation in these decision making bodies. International organizations have also favoured gender quotas.

In order to make women's political participation really effective other supportive measures are also required. Women wings within political parties should be encouraged and strengthened to increase their participation in political activities. They should be included in decision making processes of the party. Education is essential for raising awareness among women and their intensive training is also very crucial in the field of governance otherwise it will lead to another kind of government by proxy as is happening in some PRI cases (Dainik Bhaskar 2014). Women must be sensitized to Political, Economic, Social and Legal awareness in the absence of which the task of changing women status will remain incomplete. No fruitful purpose will be served unless and until the women know their power and have the ways and means to exercise that power. Without such provisions it will be a futile exercise.

REFERENCE

1. Bachelet, M. Women's Political Participation must be accelerated through quota-UN Official. Retrieved March 7, 2013, from www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?newsid=41445&cr=un#.UThTH | 2. Facts & Figures; Leadership and Political Participation. Retrieved on March 1, 2015 from www.unwomen./org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-politivalparticipation/facts-and-figures | 3. General Election Results and Statistics-Election Commission of India. Retrieved on Jan3, 2015from www.eci.nic/eci_main1ElectionStatistics.aspx | 4. Jain, D. (1996, September 22). The 33% Solution: The Idea is to change power equations. The Times of India, p. 16. | 5. Joy Mc Cann. Electoral quotas for women: an international overview' Retrieved on March 1,2015 from | www.aph.gov.au/About-Parliament/Parliamentary-Departments/Parliamentary | 6. Kaushik, S. (1996, Novemver 19). Why Women in Legislatures. Paper presented at the Meet of Parliamentarians Organised by National Commission for Women. | 7. Mahila Paarshadon ne Saadhi Chuppi Pati hue Mukhar. (2014, November 15). Dainik Bhaskar, p. 17. | 8. Panicker, L. (1996, September 20). Rights of Passage :Women in Political Power Equations. TheTimes of India, p. 8. | 9. Political Participation, (1968). In International Encyclopedia of The Social Sciences. Retrieved December 24, 2014, from http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Political_Participation.aspx | 10. Raising Female Leaders: J-Pal Policy Briefcase, April 2012. Retrieved on Jan10, 2015 from http://www.povertyactionlab.org/publication/raising-female-leaders | 11. Sec. of State Clinton:U.S.contiues to stand by Afghan Women. Retrieved December 14, 2014 from, www.msnbc.com/msnbc/sec-state-clinton-us | 12. Singh, V.P. (1996, September 20). Rights of Passage :Women in Political Power Equations. Times of India, p. 8. | 13. Women in Politics:2015. Retrieved March 1, 2015, from www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmnmap15_en.pdf | 14. Women Ministerial Positions: Retrieved March 1, 2015 from www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmnmap15_en.pdf